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The release of Heath Ledger's final movie brings mixed emotions for Lily Cole, as **David Murray** reports from London

LILY Cole expected the biggest film role of her fledgling acting career to be challenging.

But the young model not have anticipated the emotional roller coaster that *The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus* would bring.

Cole was in New York on a break in filming the fantasy-adventure movie when a friend called with news of Heath Ledger's death.

Initially, there was just shock, then sadness, and eventually questions about what would become of the 28-year-old Australian star's final film.

"Everybody was very spread out," Cole says from a London hotel suite, as the movie is miraculously prepared for release.

"We had this weird month to grieve and to also find out what would happen.

"We didn't know if the film was going to continue."

After director Terry Gilliam rescued the project, with Johnny Depp, Jude Law and Colin Farrell, it is now with mixed emotions that Cole greets the final product.

"I worked opposite him, but also that character, for so long that it's familiar again – 'there's Heath again' – there's something nice about it," she says.

"I also feel really proud, knowing how difficult it was, for everybody emotionally to finish it but also on a production level – the fact that Terry was able to do it. It was such a big kind of achievement that they managed to finish the film and that it does work."

Starring in a Gilliam film alongside Ledger (who plays a chameleon known only as Tony) and

veteran actor Christopher Plummer (Dr Parnassus) was daunting for Cole, who made her name in fashion shoots and on the catwalk.

She had previously starred in the comedy *St Trinian's*, but playing the key role of Dr Parnassus's beautiful daughter Valentina was a step up and she admits to nerves.

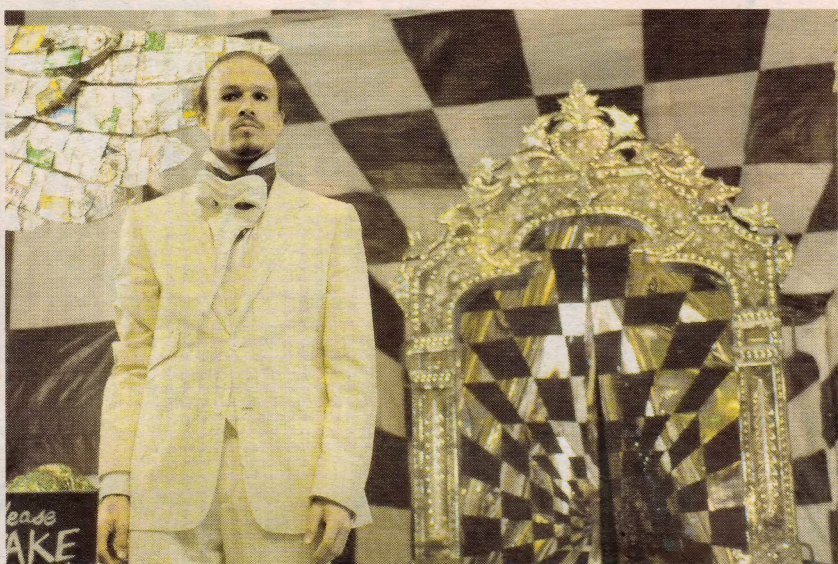
The film has her travelling through London with a circus-style show, and becoming caught up in a centuries-old battle between her father and the devil (Tom Waits).

The trio of Law, Depp and Farrell fill in for Ledger in incomplete scenes in which he steps through a magic mirror into an imaginary world.

"I don't think it struck me until we did a read-through and I met with the other actors," she says.

"They're all such brilliant people and they're all so talented and so much more experienced than I was. It was really like, 'Oh my God, what am I going to have to perform against and be a part of?'"

Making it on to the London *Sunday Times* rich list last year with



Supportive: Heath Ledger and Lily Cole in a scene (left) from *The Imaginarium Of Doctor Parnassus*; Ledger in character (above); and Cole at the Palais de Festivals during the Cannes Film Festival this year



an estimated wealth of £6 million (\$A10.5 million), Cole has the world at her feet at just 21 years.

Her good fortune started as a gangly 14-year-old schoolgirl, when a modelling talent scout spotted her when she was walking through London's Soho.

She had her big break in an Italian *Vogue* photoshoot a short time later and has since been a favourite of designers such as Chanel, Versace and Louis Vuitton.

She also appears to have her head firmly on her shoulders, studying art history at the prestigious Cambridge University.

However, it is her striking look that fits perfectly in *Parnassus*, and, for a novice, her solid performance

only films I love, but I just love that he's so intelligent and creative as a personality and that he really doesn't compromise that when he makes his films."

In many respects Cole's twin professions are very similar, she says, with both "commercially driven and at the same time full of artists who are super imaginative".

"With a photographer ... you still have the costumes, the make-up, the hair, the clothes, the background, the visions.

"Or there's someone making a film, which is a longer commitment, which has new elements like characters and relationships and a story line, but it's still creating an image and a world."

Her high profile does have its drawbacks, such as media scrutiny, which was at its peak when she struck up a relationship with Jude Law last year.

Cole says she just tries to "stay as private as possible" and ignore any unwanted attention.

"Like, I don't know all the things that have been written about me and I wouldn't want to investigate them all."

She is now seeing *Without a Trace* actor Enrique Murciano, jetting between the US and the UK. When they first met she hadn't seen his TV show, and he didn't know she was acting.

"You fall in love because you do, and the career isn't really a part of that," she says.

"I have to do these interviews, make these photographs, be in unusual circumstances that he's very used to, so I'm sure it helps that way."

Whether her acting career takes off or not, Cole says she will not forget Ledger's time in her life and the help he gave her.

"He didn't patronise me with particular tips, rather he just gave me a voice coach ... and he was just really generous, not just to me but to everybody," she says.

"He knew I was intimidated to be new and to be in those circumstances. He was constantly trying to be supportive, to tell me when I'd done well."

"He'd be very present, even if the camera wasn't on him, just to constantly try and make the best work possible out of everybody."

***The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus* opens in cinemas on October 29.**

coming soon

TINKERBELL AND THE LOST TREASURE (G) Thursday

Tinkerbell travels far north of Neverland to restore a Pixie Dust Tree. Voices by Lucy Lui, Jesse McCartney, Raven-Symone, Anjelica Huston.

AN EDUCATION (M) Thursday

Coming-of-age story about a teenage girl and a playboy in 1960s suburban London. Dominic Cooper, Peter Sarsgaard, Alfred Molina and Emma Thompson.

SAW VI (To be classified) Thursday

The story continues after the events of *Saw V*, in which detective Mark Hoffman walks out of the glass box and leaves no trails leading to him as Agent Strahm's murderer. Tobin Bell, Shawnee Smith, Costas Mandylor.

THE PRIVATE LIVES OF PIPPA LEE (M) Thursday

A woman married to a publisher 30 years her senior is forced to confront her past when they move into a retirement community. Robin Wright Penn, Alan Arkin and Keanu Reeves.

ALL ABOUT STEVE (PG) Thursday

Sandra Bullock plays an eccentric crossword puzzle constructor who, after one short blind date, falls for handsome cable news cameraman Steve (Bradley Cooper).

JENNIFER'S BODY (MA) October 29

Black comedy thriller about a small-town high school girl possessed by a demon who makes her like unattractive boys. Megan Fox, J.K. Simmons and Adam Brody.

THE BOX (M) October 29

A couple must choose between a million dollars and the life of a stranger. Cameron Diaz, James Marsden.

THIS IS IT (To be classified) October 28

Michael Jackson's final concert drawn from hundreds of hours of rehearsal and behind-the-scenes footage, captured in high definition with state-of-the-art digital sound as the late singer was preparing for his concert series in London.

THE IMAGINARIUM OF DR PARNASSUS (PG) October 29

An immortal doctor leads a travelling theatre troupe that offers audience members a chance to go beyond reality. Heath Ledger.

THE TIME TRAVELLER'S WIFE (M) November 5

Based on the best-seller about a love that transcends time. Rachel McAdams, Eric Bana.

EVERLASTING MOMENTS (To be classified) November 5

A young working-class Swedish woman, Maria, wins a camera in a lottery and transforms her life. Maria Heiskanen.

CASE 39 (MA) November 5

A social worker fights to save a girl from her abusive parents. Renee Zellweger, Jodelle Ferland, Ian McShane.

CAPITALISM: A LOVE STORY (M) November 5

Michael Moore documentary exploring the causes of the global economic crisis and taking a comical look at corporate and political shenanigans.

GENOVA (M) November 5

Family drama about a father who relocates to Italy with his two daughters after the death of his wife. Colin Firth, Catherine Keener.

It was such a big kind of achievement that they managed to finish the film

will take some by surprise. She landed the part after being asked to audition for another movie, *Sally Potter's Rage*.

The casting director then recommended her to former Monty Python member Gilliam for the *Parnassus* project.

"I obviously knew of Monty Python - I'm English - but at the same time I was born in 1987 so I kind of missed the big wave of it," she says.

"I'd seen (Gilliam's) *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* and *Brazil*.

"You only have to watch one of Terry's films and you get this impression of this very unusual vision. I'm not saying his is the only way to make a film and his are the

Asked where she sees her future, Cole says she prefers acting but accepts much of what happens to her career will be out of her hands.

"It really came quite naturally to me, these opportunities. I didn't have an agent and I wasn't trying to audition. I was lucky enough to be asked to do these things.

"Now I think I'll approach it with a similar attitude. This film will come out and if I get asked to do other things, great. But if not, I'm quite happy being at Cambridge right now and studying and occupying myself with that.

"You can't really dictate your own path necessarily too much in those industries because it's not entirely up to you."

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